



Kate Edmundson  
Interim Executive Director

# LOS ANGELES COUNTY COMMISSION FOR CHILDREN AND FAMILIES

**COMMISSIONERS:**  
CAROL O. BIONDI  
PATRICIA CURRY  
HON. JOYCE FAHEY  
ANN E. FRANZEN  
SUSAN F. FRIEDMAN  
HELEN A. KLEINBERG, CHAIR  
DAISY MA  
DR. LA-DORIS MCCLANEY  
REV. CECIL L. MURRAY  
WENDY L. RAMALLO, ESQ.  
SANDRA RUDNICK, VICE CHAIR  
ADELINA SORKIN, LCSW/ACSW, VICE CHAIR  
DR. HARRIETTE F. WILLIAMS

## APPROVED MINUTES

---

The General Meeting of the Commission for Children and Families was held on Tuesday, **September 5, 2006**, in room 739 of the Kenneth Hahn Hall of Administration, 500 West Temple Street, Los Angeles. **Please note that these minutes are intended as a summary and not as a verbatim transcription of events at this meeting.**

### COMMISSIONERS PRESENT (No Quorum Established)

Carol O. Biondi  
Hon. Joyce Fahey  
Helen A. Kleinberg  
Dr. La-Doris McClaney  
Rev. Cecil L. Murray  
Sandra Rudnick  
Adelina Sorkin

### COMMISSIONERS ABSENT (Excused/Unexcused)

Patricia Curry  
Ann E. Franzen  
Susan F. Friedman  
Daisy Ma  
Wendy L. Ramallo  
Dr. Harriette F. Williams

### YOUTH REPRESENTATIVE

William Johnson

### APPROVAL OF MINUTES

Because of a lack of quorum, approval of the minutes of the August 7 and August 21, 2006, general meetings was deferred.

## **CHAIR'S REPORT**

- Chair Kleinberg complimented the Department of Children and Family Services on its successful LOG meeting about the Title IV-E waiver last Monday. Commissioners met with the department this morning to further discuss the waiver plan.
- The juvenile court's annual Partnership Conference is scheduled from 8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. on October 5 at the Los Angeles Convention Center. Commissioner Biondi, who has in the past attended both the planning meetings and the conference itself, will be out of the country on that date, but noted that a descriptive brochure is available online. She urged other Commissioners to attend this always-worthwhile event, asking them to contact Elizabeth Hinton in the Commission office if they plan to go.
- As mentioned on August 21, the Auditor-Controller's office recently performed the Commission's periodic sunset review, due every five years. (All councils and commissions established by Los Angeles County are assigned a 'sunset date' by which they are reviewed to see if their work continues to be relevant and effective. If that examination indicates that a recommendation for 'sunsetting' is appropriate, a body may be discontinued.) The Auditor-Controller's office has recommended that the Commission's new sunset date be set for January 1, 2011. The necessary ordinance change has been approved by County Counsel, and the Executive Office has placed the item on the Board of Supervisors agenda for September 12. Chair Kleinberg expressed appreciation to DCFS for its help and support during the review process.
- **Julio Portillo** has joined the Commission office staff on Mondays and Wednesdays to assist Ms. Hinton. Interim executive director Kate Edmundson continues in the office three days a week, plus Monday mornings for Commission meetings.
- Joan Smith, interim DCFS director, will be leaving at the end of this month, having accepted a deputy chief position with Ventura County, closer to her home. On behalf of the Commission, Chair Kleinberg expressed her appreciation for Ms. Smith's keeping DCFS on track following David Sanders' departure; she will be sorely missed.

## **DIRECTOR'S REPORT**

The department's LOG meeting last Monday on the Title IV-E waiver attracted more than 300 stakeholders who heard morning presentations from the four work groups (prevention, reunification, permanency, and kinship) and discussed them in afternoon break-out sessions. Approximately 400 possible strategies were identified, culled down to 200. Although further work will be done to refine these, the 'first cut' should be available on the department's website by the end of the day today for comments and feedback.

The waiver plan was originally due to the state by September 30, but California has not yet decided the extent of state funding that will be part of the waiver. Because Los Angeles County cannot finalize its plan without that information, it has notified the state that its plan will be ready for submission 30 days from the time the state sends that data.

Ms. Smith thanked everyone who has been involved in collaboratively developing the waiver plan, particularly the co-chairs of the four work groups, and said that the department was striving for an inclusive process and a broad solicitation of input. Chair Kleinberg likewise credited community agencies and individuals who are giving of their own time to improve the system. This process has clearly increased its transparency.

### **COMMISSION OFFICER NOMINATIONS**

Commissioner Fahey announced the current slate of Commission officer nominations:

Chair:	Helen Kleinberg
Vice Chair:	Sandra Rudnick
Vice Chair:	Nina Sorkin

At the next meeting with a quorum present, Commissioners will decide on a date for this year's election.

### **CHILDREN'S LAW CENTER UPDATE**

The Children's Law Center represents as appointed counsel over 80 percent of the children in Los Angeles County's dependency system; over 20,000 clients are served by nearly 200 staff members, most of them lawyers. It is one of the largest such organizations in the country. Executive director Miriam Krinsky reviewed the center's efforts toward system reform at the local, state, and national level, bringing people together and advancing changes in the law based on the common threads seen in daily courtroom interaction.

On the **state** level, this has been an active year on the child welfare front, with the Title IV-E waiver, Assemblymember Karen Bass's championing of foster and probation youth, the creation by Justice **Carlos Marino** of a court-chaired blue ribbon commission on foster-care issues, and the *San Francisco Chronicle*'s leadership in the media. The governor's budget is seen as a tremendous step forward with its inclusion of significant foster-care investments in housing, caseload standards for social workers, higher education supports, etc. The Children's Law Center sponsored or co-sponsored five bills, three of which are awaiting the governor's signature:

- AB 2216 creates a child welfare council.
- AB 2480 establishes caseload standards (140 cases apiece) for lawyers representing foster children, and ensures that foster children are appointed appellate counsel when appropriate.
- AB 2488, authored by Mark Leno, facilitates sibling connections following adoption.

Ms. Krinsky will provide to the Commission office fact sheets and sample letters of support for these bills, which last week began their 30-day waiting period on the governor's desk.

**Locally**, the Children's Law Center has spearheaded several initiatives.

- May's Foster Care Awareness activities included a billboard and bus-poster campaign, an art display at Los Angeles city hall, and a youth summit at Occidental College. Youth from that summit testified before the first public hearing of the state's blue ribbon commission, expressing three themes: their feeling that they are not heard in the legal process, their lack of ongoing connections with siblings (an issue that prompted a panel presentation at the Partnership Conference), and their concerns with the overuse of psychotropic medications.

A special hearing of Assemblymember Bass's select committee has stimulated work with the state on this last issue, and the Children's Law Center is doing what it can to begin a dialogue both locally and legislatively in a variety of areas. Does the law do enough to oversee medications prescribed in emergency situations? What follow-up is occurring with youth? Are youth also getting therapy and other clinical support? How many are prescribed medication? Does this differ from patterns in the non-foster care population? Vice Chair Rudnick expressed her concern that youth are being put on medication for no reason except their acting-out behavior, and that they are left on medication for longer than is appropriate. Ms. Krinsky assured her that the chair of the health and human services committee, Assemblymember Bass, and others are interested in following this issue, and that the Children's Law Center will partner with them and others to formulate ideas.

Next year's awareness activities will focus on youth ageing out of the foster-care system, and Ms. Krinsky encouraged anyone who would like to be involved in the planning to contact her. She also suggested that the Commission might invite individuals from the youth summit to make a presentation, or perhaps view their video.

- A day-long summit in May addressed the mental health needs of children in the dependency system, and efforts to implement recommendations will continue into next year.
- Ongoing research and work with crossover youth (from the dependency to the delinquency court) involves an informal unit within the Children's Law Center and a justice fellow providing specialized advocacy in that area.

On the **national** level, a grant from the Pew Charitable Trusts has allowed the Children's Law Center to work with California, New York, Texas, Ohio, Arizona, and Arkansas to implement the recommendations made by the Pew Commission on Children in Foster Care. The Home at Last program seeks to improve the national landscape of the dependency court system not only through more flexible funding but also through:

- Adopting court performance measures to ensure caseload tracking and analysis, increased accountability for improved results for children, and informed decisions about the allocation of court resources
- More effective collaboration between courts and child welfare agencies

- A strong voice for children and parents in court, and better trained and supported attorneys and volunteer advocates, with reasonable caseloads
- Leadership from chief justices and other state court officials in organizing court systems to better serve children, train judges, and promote more effective standards for courts, judges, and attorneys

The Home at Last booklet Ms. Krinsky distributed, *My Voice, My Life, My Future (Mi Voz, Mi Vida, Mi Futuro)*, poignantly presents the voices of youth within the dependency system and has generated interest around the nation.

In addition, the National Conference of Commissioners on Uniform State Laws has adopted a uniform state code mandating lawyers for children, as well as a loan forgiveness component for advocates and social workers. Children in the delinquency system must already be represented by counsel, and the uniform act attempts to broaden this to those in the dependency system. The American Bar Association supports this requirement in some areas, and incoming ABA president Karen Mathis—who has already announced that at-risk youth will be a focus of hers—has created a national commission to address the issues of foster, probation, and homeless youth, youth with status offenses, and those involved in high-conflict family law cases.

New Federal dollars have required the institutionalization of child welfare commissions that pull together leadership from government and the courts on related issues. In the data and case management arena, where “what we measure matters,” there is a need for systems to build in accountability so that judges may compare themselves to other judges and courts to other courts, and so that court systems can ‘talk’ to other systems. The state has received \$1 million in Federal dollars to begin developing such a system.

Chair Kleinberg expressed interest in further discussions with the Children’s Law Center on helping the court system reflect recent changes in child welfare to a less confrontational, more team-oriented approach, and about the representation of youth in the probation system.

#### **EDUCATION COORDINATING COUNCIL**

Dr. Jacquelyn McCroskey presented a number of pieces of material gathered and analyzed by the Education Coordinating Council (ECC).

- **National statistics on the educational achievement of foster and probation youth.** Though this data is not gathered systematically, studies in various regions show dismal results, particularly in terms of the very low percentage of foster youth who graduate from college (between 2 and 5 percent). Studies also show that neglected children—approximately 60 percent of DCFS’s caseload—have more academic difficulties than those who have been physically, emotionally, or sexually abused, because of attachment difficulties and a lack of brain development in their early years.
- **Data match results.** With the help of a court order, DCFS and the Probation Department shared their caseload data tapes as of December 2005 with the Los Angeles Uni-

fied School District, which compared them to its enrollment as of February 2006. The match found 8,027 DCFS children and 2,746 Probation children enrolled in LAUSD, which is probably an underestimate because of the mobility of this population and other factors. The analysis looks primarily at elementary, middle, and high school students, since early childhood data was scanty and nonpublic school information was lacking. Achievement scores in English language arts and mathematics were particularly alarming, since DCFS student scores fell considerably below those of LAUSD students as a whole (already low), and Probation student scores dropped even further. The data is distressing, but at least some actual numbers are now available from the largest of the 81 school districts in the county. Next in line are the Pasadena Unified School District, whose data match should be released in October, and the Long Beach Unified School District; initial conversations are taking place with other districts as well. Plans are also going forward to obtain harder-to-find data from LAUSD.

- **Maps showing the location of DCFS and Probation students enrolled in LAUSD, by city council district and by high school feeder pattern.** The ECC worked with Healthy City—a web-based resource initiated by Childrens Hospital Los Angeles and run by a consortium of the Advancement Project, 211 LA (formerly InfoLine), and the Center for Nonprofit Management—to show that LAUSD’s foster and probation youth are typically clustered in poorer communities where difficulties for schools in general exist and where additional resources could make a big difference in overall achievement scores.
- **A listing of the numbers of DCFS and Probation students in LAUSD by individual school.** Although the numbers of system youth in each school may be small, clusters exist in east and south central Los Angeles in particular.
- **Details on the 203 DCFS and 89 Probation students in LAUSD identified as gifted and talented.** Three doctoral students have formed a multidisciplinary group to study the factors enabling these students to overcome barriers to achievement, looking at data from DCFS, Probation, and the schools, and then interviewing the students and their families.
- **A discussion paper on the educational status of Probation youth enrolled in Los Angeles County Office of Education programs.** Dr. McCroskey thanked superintendent Darline Robles and the LACOE research team for their cooperation in gathering this information. Most probation youth in these programs are between 15 and 17 years old, and tests administered on their admission into the system indicate that their average reading and math skills are about at the fifth-grade level. In the camps and juvenile halls, over twice as many as the national average (20 percent versus 10 percent) are identified as special education students. Historically, difficulties have existed with records being transferred properly as youth move in and out of the juvenile justice system—and even within it—a situation that has often hindered their academic life.

Dr. Sharon Watson reviewed the mission of the ECC, which is to provide a coordinating body and improve the working relationships that will make raising the academic achievements of foster and probation youth a reality. Implementation of the recommendations included in the ECC's blueprint for change, *Expecting More* (presented to the Commission in December and adopted by the Board of Supervisors in February), is underway. As a whole, the ECC is taking the lead on several initiatives, including:

- **Outreach to schools.** In April, LACOE and the ECC hosted a first-ever meeting with county department leadership to which superintendents from all 81 school districts were invited to talk about working together more effectively. About 25 districts attended, with discussions ranging from the necessity of better understanding the needs and backgrounds of foster and probation youth to developing procedures to eliminate administrative and paperwork barriers. Attendees agreed to regular meetings, and November's agenda will give schools a chance to share what they're doing and what they need from county leadership.

Because system youth often say they confide in their school counselors, Chair Kleinberg suggested also convening staff on that level, and working with principals. Dr. Watson agreed that several levels of communication are necessary—the education liaisons have also met—but that buy-in from top management is key. Superintendents do care about this population, especially since the lessons learned with these youth can carry over to all at-risk students.

- **Electronic education record.** Breakthrough work on this idea, which has been championed by the Commission for more than a decade, is being done with health data at the LAC+USC medical hub. The ECC plans to pilot the addition of education data to the medical records of foster and probation children in that hub's catchment area. Electronic-systems issues and concerns stemming from Federal and state confidentiality rules abound, but some data can be shared—contact information, the child's social worker and holder of educational rights, etc.—and the project will start there.

Blueprint implementation efforts among individual ECC members include these:

- **The City of Los Angeles,** at the request of Councilmember José Huizar, has surveyed its departments with regard to their priorities in serving foster and probation youth, and the city's audits and government efficiency committee heard testimony on August 7 from ECC staff. The city's Commission for Children, Youth and Their Families will convene a meeting this coming Thursday to take on the job of interdepartmental collaboration for children, with a group along the lines of the county's New Directions Task Force. Especially if the mayor is successful in acquiring authority over LAUSD, city/county partnerships will gain importance, and ECC's role in working with the clusters having the largest numbers of foster and probation youth will be pivotal.
- **Juvenile court.** A historic blanket order issued in June allows for the sharing of education data with children's caseworkers, attorneys, and court-appointed special

advocates (CASAs). A meeting will be held this Thursday—chaired by Monica Garcia, LAUSD's representative to the ECC—to develop a Memorandum of Understanding among the relevant agencies for the order's implementation.

- **DCFS.** Age-appropriate standards for early childhood, school-aged children, high school and special education students, as well as youth transitioning to adulthood, are being developed for parents, caregivers, and caseworkers. A departmental team is being formed to ensure that case plans include education plans and that team decision-making conferences include education efforts and issues. A pilot program in Pomona will increase awareness and training for preschool providers regarding the needs of children and families under the department's supervision, and will train social workers on the importance of early childhood education and how to access resources. A letter to parents and caregivers of three- and four-year-olds will encourage enrollment in early childhood and preschool programs. The academic mentoring program established last year at Foshay Middle School will be replicated at Van Nuys High School. Education consultants will be hired for all regional offices by January 1, and an assistant division chief over educational mentoring will be hired by this fall.
- **Probation.** Pregnant and parenting youth, both male and female, are being referred to early childhood education and child care programs. 'Transition open houses' are being held with youth leaving the camps, so that parents and caregivers understand how to deal with mainstream school structures.
- **Department of Mental Health.** A Prenatal to Five Program is being implemented in SPA 4, overall training has been stepped up, and school-based mental health services coordinators have been located in each SPA.
- **LACOE.** School districts have been asked to give foster and probation youth priority for enrichment programs.
- **Association of Community Human Service Agencies (ACHSA).** A list of free and low-cost tutoring resources has been compiled, the association has sponsored a training on educational advocacy skills, and it has worked with DCFS to ensure that caregivers and community-based agency staff are included in team decision-making conferences.

Dr. Carrie Watson reviewed some of the contributions of community agencies to implementing Blueprint recommendations.

- St. Anne's is opening the New Village Charter School specifically for young women in the foster care and probation systems, starting with ninth- and tenth-graders in 2006 and adding eleventh and twelfth grades in subsequent years.
- Cedars-Sinai Medical Center is involving foster and probation youth in its outpatient services programs and in inpatient services offered to transition-age youth.



- The Fulfillment Fund's college access program for disadvantaged youth is welcoming foster and probation students.
- The New Visions Foundation is connecting with gifted and talented system youth to match them with top-quality private schools in Los Angeles and offer full scholarships. Some youth have been identified for this school year, and a concerted effort is being made to offer these scholarships to more students next year. Commissioner Biondi in particular praised this endeavor, saying that the foundation had up to now been unable to get information from DCFS about these students to make these connections. Dr. Sharon Watson added that awareness is increasing all over to get promising students tested for gifted and talented programs.

With all these implementation efforts underway, the ECC has retained additional consultant staff for the youth and early childhood arenas. Terry Ogawa, former director of the city of Los Angeles's Commission for Children, Youth and Their Families, will lead the early childhood effort, and expressed her pleasure in the city's collecting data from its departments on how resources are invested for system youth. She encouraged the county to do the same and coordinate with the city's family development networks. Ms. Ogawa is looking forward to conversations with Commissioners on linkages between the early childhood system and child welfare, including developmental assessments, opportunities for prevention, and how teachers can participate in the electronic education record.

### **FOSTER YOUTH SERVICES UPDATE**

Pat Levinson reviewed the history of Foster Youth Services (FYS), which is run out of LACOE and is one of 57 programs in the state providing educational services to children in foster care. As of July 1, its charge expanded from group homes to include foster homes, foster family agency homes, and guardian homes—though not children placed in relative care. Prior to the passage of AB 490, enrollment difficulties for foster children were common, but now schools must enroll them even without paperwork from their previous schools. Despite this, FYS staff often find that foster children are not in school.

The group's four goals are to make sure that foster children are in school, enrolled in the appropriate classes and programs, and getting the credits they deserve, and that their special education status is not misidentified. FYS staff work with all school districts in the county, and are mostly co-located in DCFS and Probation offices. Staff attend structured and team decision-making conferences, and help with transitions to college, vocational programs, and jobs. The program is expanding into the Antelope Valley and southeastern Los Angeles, as well as in the San Fernando Valley and central Los Angeles. It served 1,800 children last year, and has developed a brochure to help school staff understand the special needs of foster youth.

Confidentiality issues are of concern in Southern California, and FYS is working with a model from San Diego to share information through a collaboration of agencies that includes the courts, the public defender, children's attorneys, school districts, CASAs, other public agencies, service providers, and private industry. It hopes to establish a

‘drip’ from the state’s CMS/CWS information system to automatically send data on foster children to a special computer every week. (Similar ‘drips’ convey information to Sacramento County on 2,800 children a week, and to San Diego County on 6,000 children a week.) The approximately 35,000 names that Los Angeles County would receive each week would include those of children in the system still living at home, but those could be filtered out of FYS records.

This drip would yield up-to-date information on foster children that could be dispersed to the county’s 81 school districts, and thence to individual schools in the districts, to help track children who are moved so that services could be provided to them. DCFS moves, by some reports, about 1,200 children a month—more than most counties have within their entire child welfare systems.

FYS will convene the next of its regular meetings with education liaisons on September 28 at the Hawthorne district headquarters.

**PUBLIC COMMENT**

There was no public comment.

**MEETING ADJOURNED**